

Fidelis

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-SasuSaku- Sasuke knelt down on the ground, his insides turning to ice. Sakura came and stood by him, her presence followed by a cry of grief. Then Uchiha Sasuke did something he hadn't done in almost fifteen years: he cried.

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Chapter 1

Fidelis

IMPORTANT: This is a sequel to my other story, titled *Blind* . If you have not read *Blind* , I would recommend doing so, because otherwise you are going to be **VERY CONFUSED**.

A/N: I'm sure you thought I all died. Man, I cannot stress how guilty I feel , but at the same time, I've become very busy with school. A basic run-down of my life over the past four years are as such: purchase of a new property that demands renovations, table-saw accident, various school items, two-month study abroad/vacation, mother got a kidney tumour, and getting a new dog. Along with other minor incidents. I've been taking a creative-writing class which has helped me greatly improve my writing. I'm still proud of *Blind* as a well-constructed story, but the writing is pretty poor in retrospect. I know some of you are thinking "But *Blind* was so good!". Well, if I think *Blind* is poorly written, you can really tell the kinds of stories I limit myself to reading. I can't read bad literature anymore. Like, actual published literature. So reading fanfictions has ceased entirely, with some exceptions.

This fic will eventually be rated M. Mostly because of Orochimaru. For those of you who don't understand why Orochimaru would make this fic rated M (who also have Windows XP at the same time): Pull up the Control Panel. Select 'Speech'. Set the speed to the slowest. Type in the text box: "My name is Orochimaru. I like small boys." Hit 'Preview Voice'. ...That's why.

Disclaimer: I do not own *Naruto*, which makes me exceedingly sad, because the plot could use some major revision.

Important Note: I'm going to be experimenting with a new writing style: something akin to the TV show, *Lost*. I'm going to be doing flashbacks, to show what happened during the timeskip between

Blind and this story. You'll figure it out, but just thought I would give you some forewarning.

Chapter One: Survival

Thunk.

Two pieces of wood fell to the ground. Itachi rested the axe against the chopping block and knelt down, feeling around with his left hand. His fingertips brushed one of the pieces, splintering wood pricking his hand. He wrapped his fingers around it and stood. He turned his body and tossed the log. A rattle of wood collapsing followed its landing in the woodpile. Itachi knelt down again and found the second piece, lobbing it after the first. Wiping sweat from his brow with his right hand, Itachi took another log.

The diameter was too wide for his palm. Sighing, he shuffled to the pile, crouching down so he could hoist the log onto his hip. Taking careful steps, he lowered the log onto the block, feeling around the edges to make certain it was centered. He felt the top—it would need to be split into four pieces at the least. Eight would be better.

He grabbed the axe with his hand. He rested the blade in the log's center, then lifted it above his head.

' More to the left. Your aim is crooked.'

Itachi shifted the axe's position to the left, and swung. The axe embedded itself half-way through the log. Itachi lifted and swung again, the weight of both the log and the axe causing strain on his shoulder.

Thunk.

The log split in two. Again, Itachi leaned the axe against the block, and felt around for the pieces.

' Farther back.'

Itachi reached, and found one of the pieces. He set it on the block. An inward itch grated at the back of his mind. Ignoring it, he reached for the axe. He aimed, and waited for a note of correction. Only silence greeted him. Itachi frowned.

' How is my aim?'

A pause.

' Aim more to the right.'

The voice sounded annoyed. Itachi swung the axe. It embedded itself into the chopping block, missing the log. Itachi sighed. The itch in the back of his mind turned smug.

"Not now," Itachi muttered.

Itachi dislodged the axe and aimed again. He swung without asking about this time. The log split at the first strike. The smugness evaporated. The itch returned, squirming in the back of Itachi's mind. It was a deliberate attempt at distracting him. Itachi didn't react, and only picked up the pieces of the log. He focused his thoughts on what would be for dinner. Itachi sensed annoyance now. He smiled to himself.

' The old woman is coming.' A hint of a sulk was laced in the statement.

Itachi heard the shuffling gait. He could imagine her petite body, shuffling to the doorway of the cottage, her hands clasped together. She watched him as he continued to work. He kept silent until she spoke—it used to make her uneasy when he reacted to her before she had let him know she was there.

"Itachi-kun."

Itachi straightened up and turned his ear towards her voice.

"Chie-san, is there something you would like me to do?"

He heard a chuckle.

"You are such a good boy, Itachi-kun," she said. "Always trying to do more work than I give you."

He smiled. "I'm hardly a boy anymore, Chie-san. I'll turn thirty-two this next month."

"Phoo, compared to seventy-three, you're still a boy," she teased.

"Fair enough," Itachi answered.

"I'm going to go into town to pick up some groceries. Would you come with me to help carry them?" she asked.

"Certainly."

Itachi swung the axe into the chopping block.

"Let me change out of my work clothes first, and then I will be ready to go."

"You should wash your face as well," Chie chuckled. "You have dirt smeared on your forehead."

He felt his forehead with his fingertips. He could feel the grit against his skin. Sweat had dripped down into his blindfold. He would change that as well, he decided. He headed towards the house, moving past Chie in the doorway.

"I won't be long," he said.

I stand surrounded on all sides. Five enemies circle me, their weapons drawn. I tense, listening carefully for the first indication of motion. They hesitated to attack, I note. They have learned from their comrades' mistakes.

" Uchiha Itachi," says one from my left. "You are to come with us and return to Amegakure. Failure to do so will result in forcible detainment."

A wry smirk passes over my mouth, despite my unease. Pain still has not given up on finding me.

" I cannot return with you," I say. "Please leave."

" We cannot do that," the man answers.

'Behind you.'

An image flashes across my mind of a man with a raised kunai lunging at me. I whirl quickly and use an upper block with my right arm. My left hand forms a fist and throws a punch into his exposed stomach. I hear the wind knocked out of him. I throw myself on him and wrestle with his hand to pry the knife from his fingers.

'Two more are coming.'

Another image. I roll out of the way, landing on my feet. I slash with the kunai and I hear a grunt of pain. My knife tastes blood, the smell fills the air. I knife strike with my right palm. My motions are frantic, I slash and stab at each sound, my knife biting in all the wrong places, my palm missing the desired targets.

'A little help would be nice.'

More images flash in my head. I prompt mentally for more as my knife strikes home in someone's throat.

'You are doing fine.'

Four years, I think to myself. My elbow plunges into a ribcage behind me. Four years without sight, fighting without sight, yet I find myself still uneasy each new battle. Each anxiety rises anew as I fight people I cannot see, can only hear, feel.

A scoff.

'Have I let you die yet?'

I ignore the question. I keep plunging with my knife, keep striking with the edge of my right hand. I pay acute attention to the signs of defeat: grunts of pain, the smell of blood, the resistance my arms encounter as I land a hit.

But still, the fray continues.

Itachi dried his face with a towel. He rested a hand on either side of the sink basin. The stone felt cool beneath his left hand, and under his right palm. He straightened up and faced the window. He could feel the sun shining through the glass and onto his hands. He imagined what the view would be like—a forest glade with green grass, and yellow flowers.

' *Stop being sappy.*'

Itachi chuckled. He turned away from the sink and loosed the blindfold from his head. The cloth fell away and he laid it across his right palm. He put it with his washing in his room, taking another blindfold as he left. He wrapped it around his head, holding it in place with his right hand so it would not slip.

Outside, he could sense Chie waiting for him. He knelt down on the ground.

"Would you mind tying this?" he asked her.

He let Chie take the ends of the cloth. She made tsk-ing sounds as she tied them.

"I don't see why you insist on wearing this thing, Itachi-kun," Chie said. "You have such lovely brown eyes."

"There are scars, from my accident," he said.

"Yes, white scars on the whites of your eyes," she scolded, tying the knot tight. "You have such a handsome face, Itachi-kun. But the girls won't be able to see that if you have your face covered all the time."

Itachi smiled, and shook his head. "Chie-san, I am not in a position to take care of any woman."

"You take care of me, don't you?" Chie said. "It doesn't matter if you don't have any fingers on your right hand. You work hard and work well."

"That is not what I meant," he said.

Chie sighed. "You always say something like that. There must be a girl from your past that you cannot forget."

He straightened up and dusted off his knees.

"Something like that."

My breath is ragged in my throat. My limbs shake from exertion. There is silence around me. The stench of blood is heavy like a haze. My clothes stick to my body from it, my hands are slippery with it. My foes are scattered at my feet. Most of them are dead. I listen carefully if there are more.

'They're all dead.'

'An exit?'

A window appears in my mind. A sliding window with a wood trellis and paper screen. I make my way towards it, stepping over the bodies. I fumble with the latch, but quickly manage to pry it loose. I slide the window open.

'Clear.'

An image of the ground passes through my thoughts. I see each blade of grass and each little rock in the path. I crawl up on the windowsill and jump. I fall down two stories; I brace myself for my landing. A well of chakra passes to me, and I take it gratefully, pushing it to my feet at the last second. I land neatly.

'Go. You're seen.'

I hear the gasps first. I run in an arbitrary direction. I cannot know what I pass, but directions words flit through my head as I move. I flick right, left, leap, and duck at the mere mention of the word. I hear someone yell for me to stop. I continue to run. The words in my head guide me. Not a finger brushes me.

'We're away.'

'But how long before they mount a pursuit?'

'Soon enough.'

I keep running. I head more south as I am instructed to. So long as I continue to escape trouble, the direction matters not.

"Good afternoon, Chie-san."

"Good afternoon."

"Are you and Itachi-san heading into town?"

Itachi heard her footfalls come to a stop in the road. Likewise, he stopped behind her, standing quietly. Chie had once said to him that he acted like her hired bodyguard, standing behind her, and not meddling in her affairs. The tone had been affectionate. Itachi knew it was out of habit.

"Yes we are. I need to do some shopping and Naomi-chan needs a check up on her pregnancy," Chie said.

"You might get to see some shinobi when you're in town, if you hurry."

The back corner of Itachi's mind erupted in discomfort. He felt his hand clench over the handle of the basket, though he made certain his outer appearance did not change.

' Shinobi. We should leave.'

' It does not necessarily mean trouble. It's been years since the last time we were attacked. They gave up on us.'

' Or they couldn't find us until now.'

Itachi blocked out the voice, though he could still sense the anxiety. It was not like he was at ease himself. The gravel path into town had been normal before. Now he scoured the area for any noise out of place, any tremor in the ground. He held very still.

"Shinobi?" Chie asked. "What a rare treat. And here I had been hoping the fishmonger had come to town."

"I'm afraid not. They're making a pit stop or something."

"Well, isn't that exciting?" Chie said. "I hope we see them. Good day to you."

"Good day, Chie-san."

Itachi heard Chie's footsteps on the path. He followed her, keeping silent, listening carefully.

' What are you doing? We should leave.'

' Chie-san could be in danger. I owe her too much to leave without warning.'

' They're after you.'

' You don't know that.'

Resentful silence.

I do not stop running until the anxiousness fades from the back of my mind. My breath tears ragged through my throat and my legs are on fire. The blood dries sticky on my clothes and skin. Water. I need to find a stream.

I cock my head to the side and listen. I only hear wind and trees. I sigh. I do not sense anyone nearby, however I cannot be certain. I must keep to the path.

'Watch for road signs.'

Mute understanding flickers in response. I walk onwards, listening as I go.

After an hour, rain begins to pour. The drops are light at first, but then they become the size of pebbles. I wait until I am soaked before taking off my shirt. I squeeze every inch of it with my good hand. I hear water trickle out of it, and hopefully blood will go with it.

Though I am thankful for the water, I find myself worried. I am reminded of Amegakure's endless torrents. The pressing memories are sharp in my mind, clearer than when I experienced each event. Pain has never come himself to get me, thankfully. I do not seem high on his list of priorities, though I know that can only last so long. This rain is safe.

He sent Konan once. She never saw me, but she was there. I sensed her anxiousness as I made my escape. I hesitated from my position in the trees. It had been two years since I had seen her last. But the pressing feeling weighing down my mind urged me to continue. I knew I had to go. That was the last time I saw her.

I hold up my shirt in front of me.

'Any better?'

'Not really.'

I smile wryly, but put the wet garment back on. As the rain continues, I try and rinse my hair and clean my blindfold. I shiver against the rain, but there is little else I can do. I left my travelling cloak behind, along with my small food supply. I carry all my important belongings on my person, in the event that I am forced to flee. I have my headband, though I never wear it.

I smooth my hair out of my face, and tilt my chin upwards. The rain washes the grime away. Konan hated the rain.

'Stop thinking about her.'

I keep my thoughts blank in response.

'She's one of them.'

'I know.'

The rain becomes heavier, and the water somehow seems chillier.

'Sometimes, I don't think you do.'

"I have to go check on Naomi-chan," Chie said to Itachi.

She took the basket from him and patted him on the arm. He stood with his hands hanging loosely on either side; but he never stopped listening. The noise in town was the same level as to be expected for a small town like the one they lived near. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, except for the sound of more excited whispers than usual.

"I don't think you'll want to come a long for that," Chie continued.
"Why don't you head into the bar and catch up with some of the boys? You spend too much of your time with this old woman. Spend some time with men your own age."

"But I would like to accompany you, Chie-san," Itachi said. The squirm in the back of his mind was twice as paranoid he was.

"Nonsense, Itachi-kun," Chie exclaimed. "Run along now, you know how to get there. I'll meet you at the bar."

She gave him a shove with her spindly arms and quickly dashed off in the other direction, chuckling to herself like she had played a wonderful joke. Itachi felt a smile tug at the corner of his mouth. He could not be upset with her.

' You're a fool. If you kill us both, I won't forgive you.'

' You never liked me anyway.'

Itachi was met at the door to the bar by some of the old folks who usually spent their time on the front step smoking pipes. Itachi said some quiet words to them and slid the door open. The bar had a quiet atmosphere and he always imagined it dim inside. The air was stuffy; people spoke in low voices to one another, and aside from the sound of rolling dice or the quiet sip on a sake dish, conversations went unheard.

But there were unfamiliar voices in the bar today. Itachi approached the counter with his usual gait, putting his right hand in his pocket. The new voices were down the length of the counter from him, speaking low, but in the hush of the bar, their voices carried. Itachi sat down on a stool.

' And who do you think is sitting in this very room with you?'

' They haven't attacked me yet.'

Heavy footsteps of the bartender echoed down the other side of the counter.

"Ah, Ita—" the bartender started.

"Just some water today, Tanaka-san," Itachi said. "I won't be here too long."

Itachi sensed the bartender's surprise, but he went away without another word. Itachi put his good hand on the countertop, feeling vibrations in the wood as it groaned under the weight of arms and scraping glasses. Itachi turned his ear toward the sound of the talking shinobi. In the corner of his mind, there was disapproval.

' Last time, you almost died. Don't forget that.'

Itachi blanked his mind.

Hunger gnaws in my stomach. I crawl on the ground, my hand groping the earthen path. Each fistful of dirt is another six inches gained. I have not eaten for two days, and though nobody seems to pursue me, I cannot stop moving forwards. My strength is sapped. The only reason I am alive is from the same thing that causes me to be chased. I claw another fistful of dirt, falling down onto one elbow from my crawl.

'Don't act as if I wanted to be put in you.'

I loosen my grasp on the dirt and my arms shake as I struggle to keep myself from falling face-first in the dust. My breath comes out in heaves. I swallow, my dry throat scraping against my tongue. I let go of my resentment.

'You are right,' I think in response, 'I apologize.'

'Tch. You're too polite for your own good, Uchiha Itachi.'

I try and pull myself forwards again, but my arms refuse to move properly. I lick my lips and try to move again.

'Rest. I don't want to spend more chakra on keeping you alive.'

'You are surprisingly considerate,' *I muse.*

'For a dying human, you're surprisingly good-humoured,' *was the dry response.*

The 'thunk' of a cup down on the counter next to Itachi caused him to start. He groped around on the surface until his hands met the cool glass. He nodded politely.

"Thank you, Tanaka-san," he said. "I am sorry I was short with you."

"Don't worry about it," the barkeep replied.

The two shinobi had not reacted at all to anything that happened since Itachi's entrance. He took this to be a good sign. He sipped his water quietly.

"I keep telling you, we should take the route northwest to get to Konoha," the one said.

Itachi paused ever so slightly. He took another quiet sip from his water.

' *Can you tell what village they are from?*

' *Musical note on the headband.*

' *Sound.*

"That steers us too far to the west, we'd have to backtrack," countered the second.

The first speaker's voice was raspy. It sounded like he had damaged his voice somehow. The second speaker's voice was normal, but sounded a little more panicky, uncertain. Itachi deduced that the first speaker must be the senior of the pair, while the other was a lesser-experienced subordinate.

' What do they look like?'

A flicker of an image passed across his thoughts. The image did not tell Itachi which voice belonged to which man, but he could guess. One man had a scar across the bottom of his chin. His clothes were presentable though well-worn. He wore an Otogakure headband sideways on his head. This would be the raspy-voiced man. The other man was younger, and wore his headband on his arm—also from Otogakure. The metal was unmarked, and his clothes were newer. This was the younger anxious-voiced one.

"That road is more travelled," said the rough-voiced man. "We'd more likely be discovered."

"Don't we want to approach from the south end of the village, anyway?" asked the younger voice. "If the road is more travelled, how come the south gate has the weakest defence?"

"It's because most of Konoha's enemies are on the east side of the village, and the south is where their allies travel from," said the gruff voice. "If we approach from the west they are less likely to discover us than if we came direction from Otogakure. Additionally, we wouldn't pass off as traders, now would we? It would make more sense to sneak in from the west."

"Konoha's defences are better than they were years ago. Targeting the leader of Konoha's Police Force doesn't seem smart. Especially since he's in charge of the defences, wouldn't he make sure he's the one who's the safest?"

Itachi was surprised. If the Force was operation again, that could only mean that it had been restarted. There was only one person he could think of that would bother to do something of the sort.

"We need to get close, that's all, remember?" said the gruff one. "We're not after him. When we meet up with the others it'll be quick. And when we're done, Uchiha won't know what happened."

Itachi stood up. It took him a moment to register that he was on his feet. The men had stopped talking. Itachi didn't entirely understand what had compelled him to stand. But when he had heard his last name mentioned, the vague loyalty to Konoha sparked. He was aware he had stood unmoving for a few seconds now. The back of his mind had frozen with shock, but now it ordered him back into the shadows.

' Sit back down. Say you thought you heard the old woman,' said the voice , 'You owe nothing to the Village Hidden in the Leaves. You have no obligation to forewarn them. No obligation to stop these men.'

' My brother—'

' Hates you.'

'— is in danger.'

Itachi approached the men. He heard them shift in their seats. He felt their wary gazes. They would be reaching for weapons.

' Uchiha! What are you doing?' the voice roared.

Itachi forced it out of his head. The men would wait to see what he was up to. He himself did not know what he was going to do. His glass of water was still in his left hand. The back corner of his mind started to panic, seeing his thought pattern. Itachi moved suddenly. He took his right hand out of his pocket and charged with his right shoulder. After touching the first body, he brought down the glass on the man's head. He let the voice back in.

' Foolish human! If you get us killed, it will be at no fault of mine!'

Itachi groped among the shards of glass for another weapon. He felt a kunai pouch. He seized it with his good hand and wrenched it as hard as he could. It was securely fastened to the shinobi's belt. The pouch ripped instead.

' You haven't failed us yet,' Itachi responded, ' I trust you, Rokubi no Raijuu.'

The ring of metal came from beside Itachi's ear indicated the pouch's contents had spilled out. He grabbed at a weapon. It was a knife of sorts, but not a kunai.

' Get back!'

Itachi sprang back. The sound of metal into wood—a kunai had been thrust downward. Now a din had risen up in the bar. Villagers were emitting sounds of shock and confusion. The sound of the demon in the back of his head in addition to the sound of scraping chairs only added to the uproar. Itachi could barely hear his enemies.

"Whoa, Itachi-san," the barkeeper shouted. "What are you doing?"

A hand came onto his arm. Itachi shrugged it off and flinched away, and mentally scolded the demon that a hand had been laid on him. An image flashed—the shinobi rising to their feet. The younger one had a bloody forehead. Itachi prompted for more. Another image. The younger one taking a fighting stance, the older one tugging on him to leave. Itachi was shown an image from behind him. More reaching hands.

' You can help me, or hinder me. Either way, we are discovered,' Itachi growled.

"Come!" said the voice of the raspy one. "We're leaving."

"No way! He attacked us!"

Itachi took a step away from the reaching hands. He eased into a stance that would allow him quick movement. The demon bristled angrily. Itachi lunged blindly toward the shinobi. Grasping hands only brushed the fabric of his shirt—he was faster than expected.

' Foolish human,' the demon roared.

Itachi felt the demon's chakra wash through him like a burning heat. Everything melted into view. He saw. He saw every flicker of every movement, every detail. Chakra sparked at the nubs that had been his fingers. The chakra condensed into five extensions off of his hand. Serviceable fingers of chakra flexed.

Itachi only had a split second to register the new information. It was enough—he could see. He could see the man had a knife out, and Itachi was in direct line of attack. Itachi reflexively countered the attack with his own weapon. The older of the two men hauled the younger man out of the way.

"Go," he shouted.

The two of them ran out the door. Itachi followed before any of the villagers could stop him. He used the demon's chakra to launch himself forwards with speed had had been unable to use in years. He came in front of the men. The two of them halted, surprised at his newfound abilities.

"Who are you?" gasped the younger.

Itachi reached with right hand and hooked the collar of his shirt with one of the chakra fingers. Pulling the fabric down he saw the shock spread on their faces.

"A Konohagakure headband!"

"Look closely," said the raspy-voiced man. "It has a scratch across it."

Itachi lowered his right hand, covering his headband again. The raspy-voiced man stared at him with wary eyes.

"Who are you?" he asked, echoing his companion's question.

"Someone who has no intention of allowing you to fulfil your plans," Itachi replied.

A beat of silence passed. And then the youngest man panicked. And charged.

I rest my head back against the trunk of the tree I sit under. I spent the last of my strength getting into the shade of the leaves. My body is failing, and the demon is responsible for keeping me alive. It is doing more work than my own body to keep me from dying.

Even keeping my head up takes more energy than I have. I head slumps forwards again. My chin rests on my chest. My breathing eases out the longer I sit. I wonder if I will die this way. To have survived so long, only to be killed off by starvation and thirst. Yet I do not feel upset. I feel this time I will die. I thought so the same day I received the demon. Contemplating my mortality seems much less momentous the second time.

I do not know how long I sit, but as I do, a melody creeps into my mind. The lullaby my mother used to sing to me when I was a child. The demon is beginning to sacrifice other functions of its chakra to focus on keeping me alive.

'It's an annoying song,' *it* comments.

'It is fitting,' *I* reply.

I never made it to Sasuke's doorstep. But he knew it would be my dirge. I do not know how he did it, but using a genjutsu, my mother's lullaby plays in endless repeat in my head. Even the demon could not break it, but it was able to lower its prominence—turning down the volume down, so to speak. It was only a faint background noise, and only if I tried to hear it. But now, the demon has relinquished its hold on the genjutsu, just keep me alive.

'I want to thank you, Raijuu,' *I* tell it, 'and apologise. Because of you, I am alive, and because of me you will die.'

A scoffing sound echoes over the lullaby. 'I would have left you dead years ago, if I could have.'

A weak smile crawls across my lips. 'What comforting words from a dear friend. Thank you.'

I imagine the demon rolling its eyes. I try and sink into sleep. Somehow, it seems that it'll be less painful that way.

Blood on his hands, and bodies at his feet, Itachi stood in the main square. There was a deafening silence. Nobody had tried to stop the fight; Itachi had learned long ago that the villagers didn't know where they fit in the shinobi world. Now, as the two spies from Otogakure lay dead at his feet, he sensed the shock of the people watching.

The people in the bar had come out. He observed how many of them stared. For the first time, Itachi saw the faces of people he had lived among. He vacantly noted the irony that he didn't know whose voice belonged to whose face. The man in the apron must be Tanaka the Barkeeper. His face was in absolute shock.

Eyes still on him, Itachi stepped over one of the bodies as he made his way over to a water barrel. He washed his hands of the blood as his sight began to fade again. The demon's chakra retreated with a tingling sensation following in his wake.

' We need to go,' Raijuu told him.

' I know,' he thought in response, *'Guide me back to the house.'*

He went back to the bodies and took all the weapons they had on them. His sight faded back to blindness. People found their voices again. Tanaka called out to him. He turned his head toward the crowd, smiling apologetically.

"I should have told you who I was," he said.

Before anyone could ask him anything, he turned towards the road. Using the chakra supplied to spur his movement, he headed back to Chie's house, the demon verbally guiding him in the dark.

The small hut seemed melancholy when he stepped through the threshold. Raijuu told him that he was being sentimental and to get over it. But in spite of that, Itachi felt doleful as he packed his few belongings—mostly clothes, some extra food, matches. He navigated the inside the house with his good hand. He'd never seen it in all the years he had lived there.

He opened a pack and stuffed the gathered items inside. Clothes were at the bottom, followed by the food in a separate bag. He felt bad taking one of Chie's canteens for water. He put the matches, and some tinder inside. A short length of rope was coiled at the very top.

' I know what you are thinking,' Raijuu said, 'You are going to return to Konoha.'

' Yes.'

' They will only lock you up, question you, and never let out again.'

' I have to take that risk.'

' On a stray piece of information.'

' I owe it to Sasuke to protect him,' Itachi said fastening the bundle shut.

' I am sure he will be very understanding,' was the sarcastic answer.

Itachi didn't reply. He straightened up and went to the front door with his bundle. He took a travelling cloak from the wall. Chie had made it for him, fashioning it to his liking. He'd asked to put a collar on it that was high enough to cover his chin. He told her that high collars kept

his neck warm. Not only had she sewn on a high collar, she had made buttons that could be fastened with one hand.

As he donned the cloak now, he thought of different ideas to communicate the situation. Leaving a note would be impersonal, cold. The situation was far too grave for that, he concluded.

' *The old woman comes towards the house,*' the demon informed him. '*Don't bother.*'

The door banged open. Itachi caught her as she stumbled in the door. Her breath was heavy from exertion, and even before her breath calmed, she spoke.

"Itachi-kun!" she gasped. "What's going on? They say that you killed two shinobi in town. Why are you dressed like that? Where do you think you're going? Those rumours aren't true, are they?"

Itachi put his hands on her shoulders, kneeling down to her level. He bowed his head, the same apologetic smile crossing his face.

"Chie-san, it is true what they said about the shinobi," he said. "I did kill them."

"Why? *How?* "

"I killed them because I am also shinobi," he said. "I have been running from my shinobi past, but now I have learned that the only remaining family I have is in danger. I cannot run anymore."

"Itachi-kun, what are you saying? Why didn't you ever tell me?" Chie's voice was laced with confusion.

"Sooner or later, it will be found out that they have been killed," Itachi said instead. "They will send more men to investigate, they will come here. I didn't want to put the village in danger, but unfortunately, I have done so. Listen carefully. When these men come. Do not try to protect me. Tell them everything you know about me. How long I

have stayed, how long ago it was that I left. Leave nothing out. Tell them Uchiha Itachi killed their men. Tell them that he has gone to Konoha . Tell them everything."

He took Chie's hands. The wrinkled skin was warm, and her bony fingers shook.

"Thank you for everything, Chie-san," he said. "I will never forget what you have done for me, or the kindness you have shown me. I hope one day you will be able to forgive what I have done here."

He dropped her hands and straightened up. Her shocked silence trailed after him as he moved past her and out the door. She was too kind, too good, for the misfortunes he had brought with him. She did not deserve them.

I fade in and out of sleep. At some point, it began raining. My clothes are wet, but my body is too exhausted to even shiver. I lie in a semi-conscious state. The rain and the song in my head are the only things I process.

And then the rain doesn't touch me anymore. I hear its sound, but something has stopped it. Something blocks the rain. I struggle to lift my head. I only manage to tilt it slightly to the side. I sense someone close, someone standing over me.

" Hello?" my voice barely works.

" Don't worry, young man," says a tender voice. "This old woman has come to save you."

A/N: Finally done chapter one after the course of a few months. I'm having a lot of trouble getting started. Gone are the days where I can just sit down and *write* , it's like I have to force it out of myself.

So, because of this **UPDATES WILL BE SPORADIC AND INCONSISTENT. I DO NOT KNOW WHEN THE NEXT CHAPTER WILL COME, SO DON'T ASK.** Thank you.

Um, and with that closing note...yeah. See you...next time?

Chapter 2

A/N: Guys, I am so sorry for not updating for over a year. This story has been dancing around in the corner of my mind, though I have seriously lacked the inspiration in writing it. Though I know what kinds of events I want there to be in Fidelis, I really don't know where I want to go with the *theme* . So This story has really been hard for me to work on as I don't really know what I want from it. I have been reading your reviews, private messages, etc. and been feeling very guilty. I am so sorry for having it this late.

Thanks to those who have been patiently waiting. And I seriously don't blame those of you who are mad at me. But I did warn you... In any case, I don't know what it's going to take to get me inspired again, but I certainly hope that it doesn't take a year to update the next chapter.

And Sasuke may seem out of character at first—but keep in mind he is coming out of the end of Blind, where he is more emotional...but we'll deal with that in good time.

Some of you also commented on the writing style. I know it's different, and it might take some time to get used to. I've decided to use fanfiction as a way to experiment with different writing styles, so each story should be a little different from the last. If you're still having trouble reading the chapters with the flashbacks, here's a tip: Read all the italicized parts first, then all the normal font. All the flashbacks are in sequential order. Same with the normal text. That way you are reading the events of the chapter in order of events, instead of overlapped.

NOTE: IN THIS STORY, THE UCHIHA CHILDREN DO NOT HAVE, AND NEVER WILL HAVE, PINK HAIR.

Oh, and MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Chapter Two: Even the Useless Information

Sai dropped a large stack of paper on the desk. Sasuke jolted awake, his hand reflexively reaching for a weapon. Sai blinked, Sasuke glared back. Taking a sheet from the top of the stack, Sasuke muttered something to himself.

"Are you upset with me, Sasuke-san?"

He raised an eyebrow at the pale artist.

"You just dropped a stack of paper beside my head while I was sleeping," Sasuke said. "You figure it out."

"I had every intention of waking you. I was not aware that you did not want to be woken," Sai said. "I did not expect you to still be here."

"And why wouldn't I be at my desk?" Sasuke asked.

"Because it is after five," Sai answered.

Sasuke looked at the clock on the wall. The minute hand was poised over the thirty-second mark, the second hand ticking its way up to the twelve. Sasuke muttered a quiet swear and rose from his seat.

"Would you like to look at these now or tomorrow?"

Sasuke slapped the sheet in his hand back on top of the stack. He gathered it in his arms.

"I'll take it home," he replied.

"All right."

Sai followed closely as Sasuke walked the hall. There were a few people left in the building, likely clocking in over time.

"Why are you here?" he asked Sai.

"I work for you." Sai sounded surprised.

"Not after five," Sasuke answered.

"Danzou-sama wanted to make sure you get those papers," Sai said.
"Developments on Orochimaru's movements."

Sasuke stopped; Sai walked into him from behind. The first words on the page went by in a blur as Sasuke's eyes scanned the document. There was a lot of unnecessary grandiloquence preceding the key information. What Sasuke was looking for was on page two: Orochimaru's name. Sai read over Sasuke's shoulder.

"Last week, two of his followers under secret operations were slaughtered," Sai said.

"Slaughtered?"

"Killed by a resident who had lived there for at least five years," Said answered. "Details are in the report. Though because this only came in today, we don't know everything yet."

"Why were we following these men?" Sasuke asked.

"That, I cannot tell you," Sai answered.

"Don't know 'can't' or can't 'can't'?" Sasuke asked.

"If by can't can't you are referring to me being physically incapable, then yes," Sai replied. "I can't can't tell you."

"That seal on your tongue again," Sasuke muttered. "Whatever. I'll beat it out of Danzou myself after I've read this."

He tucked the sheet away in his stack and resumed walking. Sai continued to follow him. Sighing, Sasuke turned his attention homeward. Sakura would be making dinner soon, and he wanted to train with the children before he went to work. He fumbled with his keys in the pocket.

"Go home," he said to Sai on the building's doorstep.

Sai gave a cheerful wave. "Bye bye!"

Sasuke sighed. "Wrong kind of goodbye. Research it and try again on Monday."

Sai's face fell into a neutral look and he bowed. "Understood."

He disappeared in a puff of smoke. Sasuke locked the main entry to the Police Force building.

I sit opposite Tsunade in her office. She has a cup of coffee in her hand, though I smell a hint of brandy in the fumes. To my left are ANBU captains Yamato and Haruno Kisho, along with Danzou, whom after all these years I still don't know whether to call him a councillor or an ANBU captain. The four of us sit grimly.

"Gentlemen," Tsunade says, "I assume you all know why you have been summoned."

She puts down her mug and folds her hands. Nobody speaks.

"There seems to be some dispute between my two ANBU groups. I want it stopped," she says.

"Hokage-sama," Yamato speaks, "I would like to apologize for causing this inconvenience to you."

"Yes, these disputes should not have troubled you," Haruno adds.

I inwardly scoff. Yamato and Haruno are the ones least responsible for the squabbling. A little from Haruno maybe, but not much.

"It is my understanding that there is a continued butting of heads which neither side has been able to rectify. I am disappointed," Tsunade says. "I expected more from our exterior defence force and our new domestic defence force."

I don't say anything when Tsunade's eyes land on me. The others have made due without the Konoha Military Police since the Uchiha Massacre. The other branches of ANBU are having a difficult time accepting its return. I will not explain anything to Tsunade. She is a smart woman, and if she needs explanation, then she is not as sharp as I gave her credit for.

" Somebody tell me why this keeps happening."

She knows why; she's waiting for the weakest link to make that accusation.

" Ever since you allowed Uchiha Sasuke to reinstate the Konoha Military Police, his troops have been meddling in the affairs of ANBU," Danzou says gruffly.

" How so, Danzou?" Tsunade barks. "The Konoha Military Police are members of ANBU too, may I remind you."

" His Police Force has gotten in the way of our investigations," Danzou harrumphs.

" Oh?" Tsunade quirks an eyebrow. "And how do you feel about this, Yamato, Haruno?"

Yamato looks surprised. "I don't feel there's a problem, Hokage-sama."

I inwardly sigh. Yamato's always been the peacemaker of the four of us.

" Sasuke-san has done everything in his power to help and coordinate with ANBU," he adds.

" Muddled information is a result of certain individuals trying to keep my force from getting any necessary information," I state. "There will be disorientation wherever forces refuse to work together."

" Tsunade-sama, may I point out—" Haruno starts.

" No, you may not," Tsunade interrupts. "This is precisely what I have expected as answers, and it is obvious that it must be changed. I am sorry to have to say that I am disappointed in all of you."

Nobody says anything.

" As I reminded Danzou, you all represent Captains of ANBU and all serve directly under the Hokage," Tsunade takes her coffee mug again. "I want more cooperation on all sides and equal sharing of information."

" Tsunade-hime," Danzou says, "I must interrupt. I agree that there must be cooperation between internal and external affairs, but there is a matter of trust."

I raise my eyebrows. Yamato shifts uncomfortably in his seat. Haruno doesn't bother to hide his look of agreement.

" Trust, Danzou?" Tsunade holds his gaze. "Speak candidly."

" If you expect me to work in total cooperation with a former criminal, you are sorely mistaken."

" And how many years do I have to live in this village to no longer be considered an outsider?" I ask.

My voice sounds more cool than I'd like.

" I was born in this village," I state. "I made a mistake in my youth. I have been loyal to Konoha since my return. I have not sold you out to your enemies nor did what my brother did and slaughtered an entire clan of good people."

" Hmph," Danzou scowls. "You should be grateful you weren't one of them. And then you turn around and betray the village that cared for you when there was nobody else to do the job."

I send Danzou a warning glare. He refuses to look at me. I sense he hasn't said everything that's on his mind.

" And may I add that your record, even after you re-swore your allegiance to Konoha, is not spotless. You nearly turned on us a second time," Danzou looks at me now.

" I did a service to Konoha. Uchiha Itachi was a long-time threat to this village. He'd sworn he'd come back for me, and I wasn't going to take that chance," I snap. "I suppose you would have preferred him to come here?"

" You left the village with authorization," Danzou says. "A serious crime, considering you were already a traitor. You got off too lightly in that your service hours were only extended by three weeks."

" I came back, didn't I?" I growl.

" Only after Haruno Sakura went to retrieve you," Haruno Kisho says.

I glance at him. He tries to sound nonchalant. Whatever is said about mothers-in-law is a lie; it's the fathers-in-law that should be avoided.

" May I point out that Uchiha Sakura's departure was also unauthorized?" I reply.

" Hmm, I wonder whatever could have driven her to do something like that?" Haruno glares at me.

" Gentlemen!" Tsunade barks.

" Sasuke-san, Haruno-san, Danzou-sama," Yamato says. "All these matters are in the past and have been sorted out. Let us focus on the present."

" Thank you, Yamato. I didn't call you here to argue. I called you here to start working on this problem. Even if I have to order you to cooperate."

Haruno visibly backs down. I make a quiet scoffing noise to myself but cross my arms and sink back into my chair.

" I have given this issue some thought," Tsunade says, "and I have decided that the best way for internal and external affairs to cooperate—The Konoha Military Police force and the remaining branches of ANBU respectively—is to send members from each force to the other one. This team will keep you informed of Sasuke's doings, and vice-versa. Understood?"

Danzou's face tells me he swallows this idea like a bitter medicine. I fold my hands, somewhat pleased by this development. I make rough list of candidates.

" No matter how much experience one has—"

Tsunade looks at Danzou.

"— or how young—"

She looks at me.

"— we all have the same duty: to protect our family, friends, and this village," she finishes.

An uncomfortable silence hangs in the air. I close my eyes , scanning the others with my senses. Yamato looks tense, like he is expecting a fight. Haruno looks impassive and grumpy at the same time. Danzou is harder to read. And not for the first time his chakra signature sends a shiver down my spine.

Tsunade slams her folder shut. I open my eyes.

*" I want these teams assembled by next week," she says.
"Dismissed."*

When Sasuke got home, Sakura was the only one in the house. He kicked off his shoes and set them neatly aside. There were no scents in the air and it was oddly still. Sasuke sighed and revelled in the quietness of the house as he made his way toward Sakura's

chakra signature. She was lying on the couch, curled up over two of the seats. A laundry basket sat on the floor at the one end of the couch. Books and school papers were on the end table and on the coffee table. The pillows from the couch were on the floor.

Sasuke felt a tug of a smile at the corner of his mouth. He walked over to her and sat in the remaining spot, putting his paperwork down on the coffee table. Sakura's arms were wrapped around a large bump on her abdomen. She had pulled her knees up as far as they would go with the obstruction in the way. Though Sakura's eyes were closed, he knew she was awake. Her chakra signature flickered groggily. He tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. She smiled.

"Did I wake you?" he asked.

"Yeah," she said. "Motherhood's made such a light sleeper out of me.

"Sorry," he said.

She shook her head. "No, if you didn't wake me, the kids would have eventually."

She pushed herself into a sitting position.

"How was work?" she yawned.

"Exhausting," Sasuke said. "I fell asleep at my desk. I'll trade you work for maternity leave."

She laughed and leaned her head on his shoulder.

"If you want to carry a baby around in your gut for nine months, be my guest." She patted her belly.

"Maybe not then," he answered. "Where are the children?"

"Aiko and Keitarou are at the Academy still. After school activities. Hisoka's at my parent's place," she replied. She looked up at him. "Just you and me."

He kissed her. She smelled like clean laundry and baby powder, and he wouldn't have it any other way. It wasn't often they were alone, at least one of the children always demanded their attention. But today was different.

"All this free time," he said when they parted. "What are we going to do?"

"Sleep," Sakura said.

"Sounds like a plan," he grins. "Get some more rest. I have a report to read over."

Sakura nods and puts her head on his lap. He sits with his hand on her shoulder, feeling the pulse of her signature, and the glow of the chakra signatures coming from her belly.

When the group that came from Danzou met with me the following week, the last person I expect to be on the team was Sai.

He stands in front of me, completely neutral with four other ANBU members. But then again, should I be surprised? Probably not. They sent him to spy on me during the Chuunin Exam, why not now too? He's working with a familiar subject. It makes sense.

"Sasuke-san, it is a pleasure to see you again," he says, extending his hand.

His voice is enthusiastic, uncharacteristically so. I only nod in acknowledgement. My eyes fall on the other members. They have equally as blank faces. I study their signature carefully. Each has varying degrees of emotion, but they are all significantly stunted.

" Introduce yourselves," I say.

Each steps forward and gives their name. And as they do, I take note of their movements, speech patterns and chakra signatures. All are remarkably similar. ANBU was to send members from each subdivision but all these ninja that stand before me have been trained under the same program and circumstances. They have been selected by one person, and it isn't hard to guess who.

" You are all working directly under Danzou," I say. "You've all had the same training. This is not the mixed group I had been promised. And Sai, cut the act. We've worked together before, I expect an honest answer from you."

Sai's face goes neutral.

" You do not seem surprised to see me, Sasuke-san," Sai says. "I told Danzou-sama that you were skilled, but he did not listen."

" And what is that supposed to mean?"

" Danzou-sama said that a specially trained group should watch you and has the backing of the majority of the other ANBU Captains on this matter. It is correct that we were all trained under the same program. Danzou-sama believed you would not notice, though when asked, I said you likely would," Sai answers. "Danzou-sama then said if you do notice, that I am to inform you that you are not as dimwitted as he had expected."

I raise my eyebrows. "Dimwitted?"

" He would also like me to tell you he is willing to give you the benefit of the doubt," Sai says.

I look from Sai to his comrades. Something is going on in ANBU that I don't like. These were hand-picked by Danzou, and will be loyal to him to some degree. The one I can trust right now the most is Sai,

but to what extent, I'm not sure. If this is Danzou's 'benefit of the doubt' then I don't want full-blown mistrust.

But at the same time, something is off. Danzou calls more shots than he should. And over the past year, I've tripped over some limbs hanging out of his closet of skeletons. For now, I will trust only Sai. As for those skeletons, I wonder how many I will find if I do some hunting.

"Alright," I say. "Let's assign you to various departments."—divide and conquer—"I have work to do, and either you're helping, or get out of my way."

While Sakura slept with her head in his lap, Sasuke examined the papers that Sai sent home with him. The first page contained formalities. As one of the respected elders of Konoha, blah blah blah, Danzou had taken the liberty of sending out this team to this part of the world because of blah blah blah, something about concerns over the area, blah blah blah... On the next page, Orochimaru's name was mentioned for the first time. Some spies on the inside reported increased activity in the laboratories. Sasuke frowned. It was not yet time for Orochimaru to change hosts again. The last time had been a year ago, it would be two more years before he needed another one.

The report went on to explain that the laboratory prep was only handled by the top forces, and the spies had not had access to them, so details were sparse. However, they had managed to discover that a small team had been sent out which was related to the laboratory activity. By the time news of this team reached Konoha, they were several days behind tracking them. When they caught up, they had been killed.

The men had been killed by a local resident. The villagers wouldn't say anything about him except that he had left after killing them. They didn't want trouble, and wouldn't meddle in the affairs of shinobi. The only info they could get on the resident was that he had lived with an old woman in town, presumed his elderly mother. Her

state was in distraught and no useful information could be gleaned from her. The report also went on to question her mental state.

Sasuke put his hand to his chin and reread the paragraphs. It didn't make sense to him. Here were two shinobi, sent on a secret mission, who had been killed by a villager. The level of security concerning this mission was high, so the shinobi would not have been amateurs. They would have been talented. How is it that a local resident who lived with his elderly mother would have been able to kill them? He put down the report on the coffee table and looked at Sakura.

He smoothed her hair and lay his hand on her arm. She was always tired when she was pregnant. The energy of nurturing life in her body while taking care of the kids took its toll. He'd taken paternity leave each time a new baby was born, but he could only afford to take so much time off. Sakura's mother was a great help, but at the same time, Sasuke felt guilty. Sakura on the other hand, hated taking maternity leave. She liked to work. At home she seemed content with the work there, but he knew she enjoyed her part time hours at the hospital more. The sleep she enjoyed now was something he felt she earned, even if she didn't necessarily want it.

With a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth, he closed his eyes and tilted his head back against the couch.

Trying to get an appointment to see Danzou is like trying to break into a fortress. There are way too many obstacles in the way for it to be easy. The team that I sent over months ago are still stuck in the lowest positions and can't help me get in any easier. Missives and appointments didn't work. I've finally had it. I sit in the waiting area outside his office, pulling the "do you know who I am?" question on the person at the front desk. I was let in, albeit reluctantly.

Something about Danzou's building is creepy. Knowing what little I do about Root, I still can't help but feel that a lot of it is still in operation. There's nobody else waiting but me. The only thing

stopping me from barging in on the office right now is the second chakra signature in there with Danzou's disturbing one.

Ten minutes pass, and finally the signature disappears. It reappears somewhere outside the building. I get up from where I'm sitting and throw open the door before any other distractions make it impossible to see me. Danzou looks up at me. His mouth is in its tight-jawed frown. Sometimes I wonder if he ever has any other expressions.

"What are you doing here?" he demands.

"If you've read any of my missives, you would know," I reply.

I don't bother sitting down. I don't want this to take long. We glare at each other over his desk.

"That group you sent me, completely useless," I snap. "They can't give me any information at all, they're not helpful, and you and I both know that they're just reporting all my activities back to you. As for my men here, I have heard nothing but apologies from them. They're kept out of the loop and barred from any important information. This isn't working."

"I don't see that there's a problem."

"Well, if you feel that way, then you can take them back. They're just eating up what I pay them and not doing anything. It's stupid to keep them."

"I can't help it if the men I selected can't deal with your personality or learn how to function in your workspace. Have you considered changing your methods?"

I close my eyes and take a deep breath. I know he'll see this as a sign of weakness, but I haven't taken my attention off of him. I have him in my sights with my senses. He's never figured this out, though I know for a fact that he's done some prying. Sai's asked some questions. When I open my eyes again, I look straight at him.

" The only reason these teams are in existence is to prove to the Hokage we can get along. These teams are a symbol of trust," I say.

" I'm not stupid, Uchiha, I know that."

" I'm not stupid either. I know you don't trust me. So I want you to take the team back. I need to know about external affairs. And I will find another method of doing so, even without your help," I snarl.

"Those men are out of my office starting tomorrow. And I want my men back."

I turn on my heel and walk towards the door. I walk with my eyes closed, watching Danzou with my senses. His face has altered to a slightly darker shade of rage. It doesn't matter to me. When I reach for the doorknob, he calls out.

" Uchiha, wait."

I stop, but I don't turn around.

" You are right, I don't trust you," he responds. "It's a rule of mine not to trust traitors."

I don't move. He's trying to provoke a reaction. I'm not going to give him one.

When I don't answer, he continues: "Maybe that's a little difficult for you to understand, but if it's trust you want, you have to earn it."

I clench my teeth. As if the last few years haven't counted for anything. I'm not going to ask what it'll take.

" Even if I don't trust you, I can appreciate your strength. Reviving an entirely pointless investigative force does take some character."

" I am not going to stay here to be insulted. Get to your point."

" If you truly are on our side, then I suppose there is one task I can leave you in charge of."

" And what is that?"

" I want you to be in charge of finding Orochimaru."

At this point, I turn around. I open my eyes for appearances sake, but I'm studying him carefully. I want to activate my Sharingan to get a better look, but he'll see that as a threat. His displeased look is neutral. It clicks, an inward smile twists on the corner of my mouth. Well, if he's hoping to catch me feeding information about Konoha to Orochimaru, he'll be disappointed.

" But," he adds, "you'll have to keep the team."

I close my eyes to look like I'm thinking about it. He's holding his breath slightly. He wants me to take on this task. I can only assume he truly believes that I'm feeding information out of Konoha.

" I'll keep Sai. But no one else."

He thinks about it. I can see the subtle changes in his facial features. I have to open my eyes before it looks strange, but I've seen enough. He wants me on this project.

" Fine."

" And one last condition," I say. "I want all the information you have on Orochimaru. Nothing left out."

Sasuke woke up when he heard the back door open. The children were home. Sakura was gone from the couch, but he sensed her signature in the kitchen. There was a pause in the clamour by the back door as the children noticed his shoes. He sits up and stretches his shoulders as the footsteps run down the hallway. Sakura calls from the kitchen, berating them for running, but they ignore it.

"Tou-san's home!"

Sasuke smiled as the two of them raced into the living room, jumping on the couch. Aiko, the eldest, smiled excitedly at him. Her dark brown hair was cropped short like Sakura's, and her eyes were a light shade of brown. She was eight. Keitarou, the younger, sat on his other side. His hair was the same shade, but his eyes were a dark onyx like Sasuke's. His forehead was exactly like Sakura's, save that his hair kept falling in front of it. He was six.

"Tou-san, guess what? I got a perfect score on my shuriken throwing test today. Bull's eye every single time," she declared proudly.

"Just as I expect from my daughter," he said. "Did you use your Sharingan?"

Aiko shook her head. "Not for this test. We're practicing closer range at school than you and I have been at home. So it was easy. Iruka-sensei said I could use it if I wanted—said I had every right to use my natural abilities, but I remembered what you said. Good aim without it means better aim with it."

Sasuke nodded. "You never know if you'll end up in a situation where you might not be able to use it either."

"Like you did once?"

"Yes. Like I did."

"Tou-san, guess what I did today," Keitarou said. "We had a quiz on the different clans of Konoha, and I was the only one who answered all the questions on the Uchiha clan correctly."

Sasuke paused for a moment, choosing his next words carefully. "What kind of questions did they have?"

"There were only three, but they asked what the kekkei genkai of the Uchiha clan was, who the current head of the clan is, and how they contribute to the village," Keitarou answered. "I was the only one

who knew all of the answers. Though I got a couple wrong on the Senju clan."

Sasuke ruffled Keitarou's hair. "That's all right. So long as your over all test score was good."

Keitarou insisted it was. While he went into detail about some of the questions, Sasuke made a mental note to talk to the teachers about when to teach the history of the clan massacre. Soon afterward, Sakura came into the room from the kitchen.

"Okay, okay you two. Your father has had a long day at work, and needs some rest. Go get some dinner," she said.

Both children crawled off the couch reluctantly. Sasuke stood and followed them to the kitchen.

"Why aren't they so excited to see you, I wonder?" he said, a smile pulling at the corner of his mouth.

"It's because I'm pregnant and moodswing-ish and that makes me no fun anymore," she responded.

"Tou-san? Can we practice some jutsu after dinner?" Aiko called from the kitchen.

"Alright. But only for a little. There's some paper work I have to do."

"Yay!" Keitarou exclaimed.

Sasuke put his arm around Sakura's waist and they both entered the kitchen.

Sasuke ruffled Aiko's hair as she crawled into bed.

"Promise we'll practice tomorrow, okay?" she said, pulling the covers up to her chin.

"We can practice tomorrow if nothing comes up, I promise," he replied.

She seemed content with his answer, and he turned off the light to her room as he exited.

"Goodnight."

"G'night, tou-san. I love you."

"Aa."

He met Sakura in the hallway coming out of Keitarou and Hisoka's room.

"Hisoka?" he asked.

"Went to sleep right away. Hopefully for the full night," she replied.

Sasuke peeked in the doorway. Keitarou smiled, and Sasuke waved. Sakura mouthed 'goodnight' and closed the door. They brushed their teeth and walked hand in hand to the bedroom.

"So, the report I got today...I may have to swing by the office early tomorrow morning," Sasuke said, taking off his shirt.

"Why? What happened?"

"It might be nothing significant, but something is strange," he replied. "Some of Orochimaru's men were killed in a small backwater town near our southern border."

Sakura crawled into bed, frowning. "Now that is strange, seeing as it's as far away from Otogakure as you can get."

"Exactly," Sasuke replied. "What makes it stranger is that some resident in the village killed them."

"So, what are you hoping to find out tomorrow at the office?"

Sasuke crawled in bed next to her, taking her in his arms. He kissed her neck and placed a hand on the swell of her belly.

"I don't know. The situation doesn't feel right. But at the same time, it could be nothing."

"Well, I guess we'll only find out in time."

Sasuke nodded, and then a grimace spread on his face. "At least Danzou is keeping his promise. Every bit of information about Orochimaru has come to me. Even the useless stuff."

Sakura stared contemplatively out the window. "I wonder why Orochimaru would send his men all the way down there?"

Sasuke followed her gaze. She watched the moon through the blinds, whether she saw it or not. He sighed.

"I don't know."

A/N: Okay, I normally don't do this, but my sister is writing a Legend of Zelda parody of Wind Waker, and she's sad because she doesn't have a lot of readers. It's called "Totally Bizarre" by Cherry-sama. For those of you who play Zelda, you should check it out. It's pretty funny, and I edit it for her. So if you need some laughs, you know where to look. Chapter one is a recap sort of chapter, but it picks up right away in Chapter Two.

In other news, I forgot to mention changes there will be in this story. The most important one is: DUE TO DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NARUTO MANGA, I HAVE COME TO TERMS WITH THE FACT THAT NAGATO AND KONAN ARE NOT SIBLINGS. THEREFORE, I WILL BE CHANGING THAT IN BLIND AND IMPLEMENTING IT IN THIS STORY. PAIN AND KONAN ARE NO LONGER SIBLINGS IN THE BLIND STORYLINE.